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Citizen board calls financial aid increase essential to ensuring college opportunity

ELLENSBURG -- To keep college affordable for needy students, the state will have to significantly boost its investment in financial aid, according to the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB).

The nine-member citizen board today approved its budget request to the Washington State Legislature for the 2001-2003 biennium. The Board's top priorities are helping more low- and middle-income students go to college through the State Need Grant program, which serves the state's poorest students, and the State Work Study program, which helps needy students earn money for college while gaining valuable career skills.

"Tens of thousands of young people in Washington State fail to graduate from high school and earn a college degree," said Bob Craves, HECB chairman and a founder of Costco Wholesale. "Helping another 5,500 of these young people go to college will pay enormous dividends to taxpayers down the road."

A \$57.3 million increase in financial aid would enable the state to offer State Need Grants to 3,500 more low-income students, help 2,000 more students earn money for school through State Work Study, and fully fund awards for all Washington Promise Scholarship recipients. The Washington Promise Scholarship provides awards to low- and middle-income students who graduate in the top 15 percent of their high school classes.

Research shows that financial aid awards, which include a reasonable mix of grants, work study, and loans, are most likely to improve persistence and success among financially needy students. Without aid, low-income students are significantly less likely to go to college. Nearly one in six Washington students -- or about 55,000 people -- currently receives some form of direct state financial aid.

HECB Executive Director Marc Gaspard said the additional state investment would help "level the playing field for needy students" and "ensure that every Washington student who wants to go to college can go."

In addition to financial aid enhancements, the HECB budget request includes proposals to train more people in high-demand fields and reach out to people who are the first in their families to go to college or living in underserved areas of the state.

The Board also approved seven degree programs, including an innovative B.S. program in Manufacturing Engineering at Boeing, offered in Kent, Auburn, Renton, and Everett through Washington State University.

Briefing documents for the board meeting are available on the HECB Web site at <http://www.hecb.wa.gov/intro/packets.html>.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board is a nine-member citizen board appointed by the governor to represent the broad public interest in the development of state higher education policy. The Board administers all state-funded financial aid and provides policy, regulatory, and fiscal recommendations at the request of the Legislature and governor.

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